

UNDERSTANDING THE MONITORING PRACTICES OF TELEWORKERS IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose - The concept of teleworking or telecommuting is known as working away from the traditional brick and mortar office at anytime and anywhere through utilizing ICT tools to link workers to their main office. In practice, Malaysia has started implementing the teleworking arrangement especially in multinational corporations. However, the implementation is not widely spread in the nation because majority of the Malaysian organizations do not officially acknowledge the concept of teleworking (Rafidah et al., 2006). The most common issue among managers who manage teleworkers is the loss of control over their subordinate's daily job activities (Davis, 2011). On the other hand, employees are concerned with the issue of violation of workplace privacy and decreased opportunity for jobs promotions. There have been many studies that focuses on monitoring strategies of teleworkers and organizations in the western context (Kurlan and Egan, 1999; Fairweather, 1999). However, the strategies for monitoring Malaysian teleworker could be different as people in Malaysia are integrated into cohesive in-groups with collective tendencies (Ndubisi, 2004). Thus, the objective of this research is to explore the monitoring requirements and to identify the practices of monitoring teleworkers in Malaysian government organization. This research is based on a case study of Jabatan Kerja Raya (JKR) or Public Works Department where the results are mainly based on the practices of teleworking at JKR. Organizational Control theory has been used as a framework in achieving the objectives of the study. Three types of controls that are output, behaviour and clan are being examined and confirmed that all those controls are required in monitoring teleworkers.

Methodology - This research employed a qualitative methodology with focuses on the single case study about the Work from Home Pilot Program organized by Public Work Department (JKR) under the Ministry of Work. Based on the organizational control theory (Gosset, 2009; Tannenbaum, 1968; Eisenhardt, 1989), a research framework is developed to guide our analysis (Nafishah et. al, 2013). The data collection methods are interview and reading the related document produced by JKR and letters from Public Service Department (JPA). The purpose of the variety of methods

for collecting data was to triangulate data to ensure that the data is valid. The interview questions were adapted from the previous studies on teleworking (Rafidah et al., 2006). In this study the researcher interviewed the manager that was responsible for the JKR Work from Home Pilot Program. The Content analysis technique was used to analyze the data. After data analysis, the researcher emailed the preliminary findings to the respondent as part of member checking technique to seek confirmation of the validity of the data collected and analyzed.

Findings - The findings are based on a single case study of the public service department's Work from Home Pilot Program project. This program was to be implemented on trial basis. Department of Public Service or Jabatan Perkhidmatan Awam (JPA) is the agency involved that absorbs Work from Home Pilot Programs as part of an innovation and the transformation of the civil service. Jabatan Kerja Raya (JKR) or Public Works Department under the Ministry of Work is the very first public institution to implement this Programme. The project involved 39 staffs who were selected based on the scope of duties which only involve with the use of computers and Internet. Those selected for the project were shortlisted based on their job performance, scope, place of living and family status. However, there were no changes in their salary and allowances. The research finding shows that JKR has adopted the blended type control of behavioral, output and clan during the program. For behavioural control, four mechanisms were practiced in monitoring teleworkers which are work requirement formalization, rules and protocols, technological monitoring usage and physical supervision. The output control mechanism include goal setting process, deliverables focus and checkpoints. The teleworkers were measured on the quality and the timeliness of the deliverables. The checkpoints or status update is a policy of the company that is specified that the teleworkers should provide status updates periodically (i.e. daily, weekly etc.). Six concepts proposed by (O'Dwyer, O., Conboy, K., & Lang, M., 2013) was applied to analyse the use of clan control in the public sector department. Based on the blended mode of control, the monitoring practices must have clear organizational goal and policy, ICT as alternatives of visibility and presence lacking in monitoring and trust between (JKR) employer and employees.

CONCLUSIONS

This research is the provision of real industrial experience of managers in monitoring teleworkers which could create a balance between the needs of managers and teleworkers in terms of job satisfaction. The study limits its scope of monitoring practices in one public organization only which is JKR. Thus, it would be worthwhile to further investigate in a wider scope to include private sectors. It is anticipated that the finding would include various types of monitoring practices that can be implemented in organization fit to their teleworking environment. Our work is dedicated in exploring the experiences of managers in monitoring teleworkers. In order to enrich the finding, it would be worthy to explore the perspective of both managers and teleworkers. Hopefully, it would balance the need of managers and teleworkers in terms of job satisfaction. This would create a win-win situation for both parties.

Keywords: Control, case study, content analysis.

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